

# 55 Phrasal verbs

Some verbs in English have two or more words in them, and usually have a new meaning when they are used together. These are called phrasal verbs.

See also: Verb patterns with objects **53**  
Prepositions **105** Separable phrasal verbs **R20**  
Inseparable phrasal verbs **R21**

## 55.1 PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs have a verb plus one or more particles (prepositions or adverbs.) The particle often changes the usual meaning of the verb.

PHRASAL VERB

I **get up** early every day.

Verb      Particle



### HOW TO FORM

The particle always comes after the verb. The verb changes form to match the subject as usual. The particle never changes form.

He **gets up**. ✓

The verb takes the third person "-s."

He **get ups**. ✗

This is wrong. The particle should never change.

He **up gets**. ✗

This is wrong. The particle should come after the verb.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES

You **work out** at the gym.



My cat sometimes **runs away**.



They don't **eat out** very often.



Do you always **turn up** late?



Questions are formed in the usual way.

He **doesn't go out** when he's tired.

Negatives are formed in the usual way.



She **chills out** in the evening.



We can **check into** the hotel now.



Do they **meet up** most weekends?



## 55.2 PHRASAL VERBS IN DIFFERENT TENSES

When phrasal verbs are used in different tenses, the verb changes, but the particle remains the same.



The particle never changes.

PRESENT SIMPLE

I **work out** every week.

PAST SIMPLE

I **worked out** yesterday.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

I **am working out** right now.

FUTURE WITH "WILL"

I **will work out** tomorrow.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES



I **cleaned up** the kitchen last night.



Their car is always **breaking down**.



I think we're lost! We should have **looked up** the route.



She doesn't **dress up** very often.



You should **go over** your answers again.



I am **counting on** Rajiv to give the presentation next week.



I can't believe she **turned down** the job.



I **met up** with my friends last weekend.



I'm still **getting over** the flu.



When will they **grow up**?

### 55.3 SEPARABLE PHRASAL VERBS

If a phrasal verb has a direct object, it can sometimes go between the verb and the particle. Phrasal verbs that do this are called "separable" phrasal verbs.

He is picking up litter.

The object can go after the particle.

He is picking litter up.

The object can also go between the verb and the particle.

He is picking it up.

#### FURTHER EXAMPLES

I turned on the light.



I turned the light on.

Can you pick up that box?



Can you pick that box up?

You should throw away those old shoes.



You should throw those old shoes away.

I was annoyed because he woke up the baby.



I was annoyed because he woke her up.

I always fill up the water jug when it's empty.



I always fill it up when it's empty.

#### ! COMMON MISTAKES SEPARABLE PHRASAL VERBS

If the direct object of a separable phrasal verb is a pronoun, it must go between the verb and the particle.

Pronoun

He picked it up. ✓

The pronoun cannot go at the end of the sentence.

He picked up it. ✗

## 55.4 INSEPARABLE PHRASAL VERBS

Some phrasal verbs cannot be separated. The object must always come after the particle; it can never sit between the particle and the verb. This is true whether the object is a noun or a pronoun.



The verb and the particle must stay together.

We had to run to **get on** the train. ✓

We had to run to get the train **on**. ✗

This is wrong. The object can't sit between the verb and the particle.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES

I need to **go over** my notes.



I **ran into** her at the supermarket.



Susan really **takes after** her father, they're very similar.



**Drop by** the house any time you like.



I've **come across** a new recipe.



He **sleeps in** most Saturdays.



I'm **taking care of** my sister's children tonight.



They will have to **do without** a trip this summer.



It's great to **hear from** you!



**Get on** this bus for the beach.



Caterpillars **turn into** butterflies.



**Get off** that bicycle if you don't have a helmet.



He has **fallen behind** the rest of the class this year.



I am **looking into** visiting somewhere warm.



## 55.5 THREE-WORD PHRASAL VERBS

Three-word phrasal verbs have a verb, a particle, and a preposition. The particle and preposition often change the usual meaning of the verb.



## INTONATION

In spoken English, the stress is on the middle word of a three-word phrasal verb.

**look up to**   **get along with**   **look forward to**

## FURTHER EXAMPLES



We have **run out of** coffee, so I'll get some more.



You're walking too fast, I can't **keep up with** you.



I must have dropped my keys when I was **getting out of** the car.

### TIP

Most, but not all, three-word phrasal verbs are inseparable.

## 55.6 "GET BACK FROM"

"Get back from" can be separable or inseparable depending on the context.

When "get back from" means "to return from," it is always **inseparable**.

I **got back from** Italy yesterday.



When "get back from" means "to retrieve from" it is **separable**. The object must go between "get" and "back."

I need to **get** the lawn mower **back from** Tina.



## 55.7 NOUNS BASED ON PHRASAL VERBS

Some nouns are made from phrasal verbs, often formed by joining the verb and the particle together. When these words are spoken, the stress is usually on the verb.



The teacher asked me to **hand out** the exam papers.

Verb → Particle



The teacher gave us a **handout** for the lesson.

Stress is on the first syllable.

Sometimes, the noun is formed by putting the particle in front of the verb. In these cases, the spoken stress is usually on the particle.



Oh no! It was sunny and now it's **pouring down**.



We have a rainy season with daily **downpours**.

Stress is on the first syllable.

### FURTHER EXAMPLES

The company is trying to **cut back** on staff expenses.



Not another **cutback**! The company must be in serious trouble.

It's a shame that he wants to **drop out** of school.



We've had a surprisingly high percentage of **dropouts** in the class.

We want to **get away** and go somewhere sunny this winter.



A trip to Australia sounds like a fabulous **getaway**.